



FALL/WINTER 2011-2012 NEWSLETTER

National Weather Service, Charleston, WV

12/22/2011

Incident Meteorologists Assist With Forest Fire and Tornado Recovery Efforts

Incident Meteorologists (IMETs) Simone Lewis and Mark Pellerito were dispatched to provide weather support at five different incidents this year. Incident meteorologists provide both real time weather information and forecasts at disasters to help emergency management personnel make important operational, and sometimes life saving decisions. Information from weather forecasts are used to plan evacuation areas and routes, plan air operations for evacuations of the injured or for forest fire suppression

efforts, plan for the overall safety of emergency personnel on the scene, anticipate the allocation and movement of necessary resources (such as in fire suppression), and make future operational decisions, to name a few. They are an important part of the NWS mission to protect lives and property.

Mark Pellerito, an Incident Meteorologist since 2007, provided weather support for tornado recovery efforts for FEMA/Alabama EMA after the historic tornado outbreak in the southern U.S. last spring.

He provided direct weather support for more than 1,000 emergency personnel scattered at different disaster response centers throughout the state. He also served as a NWS liaison, setting up warning services and coordinating tornado track information from multiple NWS offices with other involved agencies and partners. While there, he was particularly moved while visiting high end EF4 damage swaths. Memorial Day Weekend, even many weeks after the tornado, much of the Tuscaloosa area still looked like the morn-



ing after. There, multiple bouquets of flowers were set up at a house where three little girls died in the tornado. This scene

immediately caused Mark to think of his children, and the NWS mission of protecting lives and property.

Mark's second

dispatch was to the Lateral West fire in the Great Dismal Swamp near Suffolk, VA in September. This turned out to be very



Incident Meteorologists Cont...

different from a typical wildfire dispatch, not only because of the rare earthquake that struck the day he arrived, but also due to Hurricane Irene targeting the incident. His job quickly transitioned from wildfire support, to coordinating evacuation and preparation. Countless thousands of pounds of heavy earth-moving equipment, massive pumps, and trailers were all centrally relocated and/or

prepped for Irene's impact; immediately followed by evacuation of personnel well inland. Amazingly, even after 10-12 inches of rain from the storm, the swamp fire continued to burn in deep peat soil through what was a dry remainder of fall. The fire was at last declared out November 21st, 2011.

Simone Lewis, a recently certified IMET, participated in three incidents this year: The Honey Prairie fire in the Okefenokee Swamp of southeast Georgia, the Pagami Creek fire in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area of the Superior National Forest near Ely, MN, and Bridge Day near Fayetteville, WV. Both the Honey Prairie and Pagami Creek fires resulted from lightning strikes in

drought stricken areas.

As of mid December, 2011, the Honey Prairie fire has burned for over 8 months, and continues to creep and smolder 3 to 4 feet deep into peat. The fire has burned around 309,200 acres, and an unknown amount of cubic feet

beneath the surface. Tourist activities including camping, canoeing, and hiking have been severely disrupted due to the fire, and several structures within the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge have been threatened, including the visitors center. It is estimated that at least 6 to 8 inches of rainfall

is needed over the area to bring water levels up enough to extinguish the fire.

The Pagami Creek fire near Ely, MN burned over 92,000 acres, late this summer into mid fall. Like the Honey Prairie, the fire had serious impacts on tourist activities in

the Boundary Water Canoe Area Wilderness, including closure of much of the wilderness to the public. In addition, smoke from the fire was observed as far away as Chicago. The burn scar is large enough to easily be seen by satellite

(see image 1). This fire was the worst fire in the history of Minnesota since the historic Cloquet fire in 1918. In that fire, 453 lives were lost and 52,000 people were injured or displaced. In addition, over 250,000 acres, and 38 com-

munities were destroyed. Fortunately, no lives were lost in the Pagami Creek fire.

In addition to forest fire and tornado recovery efforts, the incident meteorologists at NWS Charleston, WV provide weather support for Bridge Day



near Fayetteville, WV. Several agencies are involved in Bridge Day activities including local sheriff and emergency management departments, the FBI, and U.S. Marshall service to name a few. In addition, around 100,000 tourists visit Bridge Day annually, along with over 300 base jumpers who often make several jumps each. NWS meteorologists provide forecasts to aid in the set-

up of Bridge Day activities, plus monitor weather conditions for hazards such as strong or erratic winds and/or thunderstorm activity, that would affect the safety of jumpers and the visiting public alike.



Image 1: Satellite image of Pagami Creek burn scar.



Lateral West fire, 2011



Tornado Damage in Alabama.



Site where 3 girls died in tornado outbreak

Meteorologist in Charge at NWS Charleston Retires After Nearly 40 Years of Service (by: David Marsalek)

On December 2nd, 2011, we bid a very fond farewell to our Meteorologist – In – Charge, Alan Rezek, who retired from the National Weather Service after 39 years and 9 months of Federal Service. Alan was born in New York City

in 1951. He attended Parks College, an affiliate of St. Louis University and graduated with a degree in Meteorology in 1973. Alan's career in the National Weather Service began while in school in 1972 as a student trainee in the forecast office in

Albany, New York. He came to the Charleston office after graduation in 1973 as a Meteorologist Intern, and in 1976, became a General Forecaster. He then took a position as the Agriculture Meteorologist in the eastern panhandle of West Vir-

ginia in 1978, where he retained that position for 2 years. Alan returned to the forecast office setting in Washington DC as a General Forecaster again for 2 years, and then became the chief at DATAAC (Data Acquisition Division) in Eastern Region back on Long Island. Alan's last stop brought him back to the Charleston, West Virginia office where he became the Meteorologist – In – Charge in 1986, a position he held for 25 years. Alan's legacy is defined as that of a master innovator and forward thinker, never afraid to be a pioneer to improve the service of the agency for the bene-

fit of the public. The Charleston office became known nationally for its progressive nature, often leading the way in cutting edge ideas that would eventually be used by other offices on regional and national scales. A few notable achievements amongst his many accomplishments include the creation of digital forecasts through graphics editing significantly improving the forecast products, creating a universal coding system for computers to decipher and disseminate forecast products, and expanding service for the aviation community. Alan's hard work and dedication put the Central Appala-

chians and Middle Ohio Valley region of the country on the map in both meteorology and public service.

In addition, Alan has dedicated a significant portion of his free time and effort to the Kanawha Valley through his church, weekly Meals on Wheels deliveries, and serving as a mathematics tutor for kids.

Despite his retirement, Alan shows no signs of slowing down. On October 31st, he completed his first marathon, The Marine Corps Marathon, in Washington D.C. in 5 hours 59 minutes. His future plans include increasing his volunteering work load, spending time with his family, catching up with needs around the house, and diving into his passion for photography.

Please join us in wishing Alan well wishes for his retirement!



Left: Meteorologist In Charge Alan Rezek



Join us on Facebook!

By: Tim Axford, Meteorologist

The National Weather Service in Charleston, WV has ventured into the world of social media by creating a Group Page on Facebook. Come join us at:

<http://www.facebook.com/US.NationalWeatherService.CharlestonWVA.gov>



Screenshot of the NWS Charleston, WV page

We plan to use this page as a way to connect to our users in a way that hasn't really been done before. If you come "Like" our page you'll be able to share comments, ask questions, and post pictures of weather happening in your area. Already, over a hundred people have joined us and are posting content on the Group Page including pictures and articles related to weather and climate. Have cool pictures of hail stones from that recent storm or dense valley fog that developed in your area overnight? Feel free to post the pictures and your story on our page. Please remember to add the location and other important details so we can all know how and where the event occurred.

Also, NWS sponsored events will be posted on our Group Page, so you'll be able to stay updated on all of the local and regional happenings hosted by NWS Charleston, WV. There is even a function on our page that will let you RSVP to any of our weather related events or spotter talks. So you can show your intent to attend or not and even see if your friends or neighbors may be planning on attending as well.

While the NWS Charleston, WV Facebook Group Page will mainly be used as a community outreach tool, we will also automatically post weather Watches issued for our County Warning Area. While this should not be your only source of weather threat information, this will help to keep you up-to-date on the potential weather impacts of the day.

Curious as to how this all looks on-line? Come check us out at the link above. You don't have to be a Facebook user to see our page, you will have to be a Facebook user to "Like" us and post comments and pictures though.

